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*Rosebery, Archibald Philip Primrose, 5th Earl of*  
*(1847-1929)*

PRICE THREEPENCE.

LORD ROSEBERY'S  
SPEECH

ON

The Anti-Corn Law League

AND

Free Trade,

DELIVERED AT

THE FREE TRADE HALL,

BEFORE THE

MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,

On the 1st November, 1897.



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# SPEECH

OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL OF ROSEBERRY, K.G., K.T.,

BEFORE THE

MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,

*At the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on the 1st of  
November, 1897.*

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I am deeply grateful to you for the cordiality of your reception to-night. It is at any time an honour to speak in the Free trade Hall to a great audience of Manchester citizens such as this is. But on this occasion I deem it a signal though rather an embarrassing distinction. I venture to think that there was among your cheers to-night a note of compassion when you received me. And I will tell you why. On such occasions as these, when you have the Free Trade Hall crowded to the roof, you expect from some eminent politician a controversial speech, spiced with epigram and possibly not removed from personality which shall tickle the political palate of the audience and keep it in a state of agreeable excitement. But to-night we can have none of these things. This is one of those occasions which I think are somewhat too rare among us when great audiences meet together, composed of both, or perhaps I ought rather to say of all, the parties in the State—(laughter),—from which, therefore, everything of a controversial kind is banished. (Hear, hear.) It is all very well to say “hear, hear,” but is the gentleman who says “hear, hear” prepared to discourse for an hour on an uncontroversial topic with eloquence and vivacity before a crowded audience? (Laughter.) If he is, I am willing to give place to him.

THE MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE : AN HISTORICAL  
RETROSPECT.

Now, the occasion that we are met to celebrate to-night is of a very much more peaceful character. I have



enumerated some of the disabilities under which I lie to-night, but I have not named what, after all, perhaps, is the greatest, that we are assembled to commemorate the centenary of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and it is not a centenary at all. I confess that when I ascertained from my friend the president that such was the case my courage almost failed me. How was I to come, in these days of epochs and anniversaries, to celebrate a centenary which had already long passed by? But the gloomy fact of the situation is this, that your centenary took place, not in 1897, but in 1894. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce, like many human beings, was vague as to the date of its birth—(laughter), and only discovered it recently in an accidental exploration. Well, after all, “better late than never.” It is a good occasion; it is a time that we must not neglect. We must never forget the foundation of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and it would have been better to defer the celebration for ten or fifteen or twenty years too late than not to commemorate it at all.—(Hear, hear.) The birth of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce took place in wild times of war and difficulty. The year 1794 found us in the midst of revolution; in the second year of a war with France, in the very commencement of a struggle which was destined to last for nearly twenty years. I can hardly imagine a more gloomy moment for the birth of so peaceful an institution as this. And what was it that the Manchester Chamber of Commerce set itself to do? Although it was patronised by the great men of Manchester of that day—the Peels and the others,—all that it attempted to do, or at any rate its primary duty, was this, to establish a black list of firms abroad with whom it was not safe to deal. And what was the result of this effort of Manchester in 1794? That black list contained only one name, and that name upon consideration was expunged.—(Laughter.) I venture to think that was very creditable to Manchester in those days. We all of us have our black lists.—(Laughter and applause.) There is not an individual in this hall who has not his confidential black list, who has not his political black list, who has not his literary black list,

who has not his social black list, and who, perhaps, has not his financial black list.—(Laughter and cheers.) But I venture to say there is not a single person here that is so fortunate as the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and has only one name on the black list that he keeps in his innermost mind. Now, no one, I think, could have augured from that humble beginning the imperial destiny, the cosmopolitan destiny, reserved for the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.—(Cheers.) I pass over nearly half a century of work, useful work, employed in deputations to the Governments of the day, employed perpetually in the work of endeavouring to free commerce from its chains; and I come to the great critical epoch of your history, which was December, 1838.

#### ADVENT OF THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE.

Before December, 1838, two events had happened in Manchester which were destined to bear the most speedy fruit. In a small room over a stable in a Manchester hotel-yard there had met in October, 1838, seven men, who had then set on foot a resolution to form a league, which should not be dissolved till the Corn Laws were done away with—(cheers.) About the same time Mr. Ashworth tells us in his history that he was walking with Mr. Cobden, I think it was in Liverpool—(cheers,)—and they had been talking of these taxes, and Cobden stopped, and said, “I will tell you what it is, Ashworth, we will use the Manchester Chamber of Commerce as a lever for doing away with the Corn Laws.”—(Cheers.) And what Cobden said he usually did; so he came to Manchester in December, 1838, and in two great meetings he beat the governing body of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which was not so enlightened as himself, and he got the Chamber of Commerce to petition for a repeal of the laws relating to the importation of foreign corn and other foreign articles of subsistence.—(Cheers.) Now, I think that that occasion reflects undying lustre on Manchester and its Chamber of Commerce.—(Cheers.) Cobden himself said afterwards that “just as Jerusalem was with the origin of our faith, and just as Mecca was in the eyes of of the Mahometans, so would Manchester be identified in

the eyes of historians as the birthplace and the centre of the greatest moral movement since the introduction of printing.—(Cheers.) There is no need to tell you here to whom you owe this achievement. You, sir, have dwelt in your introductory remarks on some of the names that occurred to you; but I venture to say that it is not necessary in Manchester, it would be almost impertinent on the part of a stranger, to run over the Homeric list of names which constitute the glory of this movement. It would be still more difficult to give the full meed of approval to those unknown workers, those unknown givers, who swelled so largely the success of that movement.—(Cheers.) There is one name, however, that we cannot forget to-night. That is the name of the Parliamentary pioneer of the movement, who was enabled to work for it before Cobden ever became a member of Parliament, who lives happy among us in a green and honoured old age, who is still a member of the House of Commons, and who still sits for Wolverhampton, the pedestal from which he urged that reform—I mean, of course, Charles Pelham Villiers.—(Loud Cheers.) This movement had another rare distinction. It produced a great poet and a great orator. The poet was Ebenezer Elliott; the orator was John Bright.—(Cheers.) When one thinks of John Bright in this Free Trade Hall of Manchester, and of the eloquence with which he has thrilled it, one almost feels inclined to sit down or to leave the hall. But it is difficult for anyone who has had the honour of his acquaintance not to pay one word of tribute to his memory, as one knew him—to his geniality, to his kindness, to his simplicity, to his inherent dignity, to his horror of all that was false, or cowardly, or untrue.—(Cheers.) I think there is nothing in all the annals of our political history so completely and unalloyedly beautiful as the political brotherhood of Cobden and Bright, the great twin brethren who slew the Corn Laws. (Cheers.) I suppose they each of them were to some extent the complement of each other. Each had in superabundance qualities which thrown into the common stock made an irresistible force. Cobden had the



sagacity, the persuasion, the initiative; Bright the splendour and the eloquence. And he had something else. Bright, as you know, was a Quaker, but he was the most pugnacious Quaker that ever lived.—(Cheers),—and I think we may say, without any fear of contradiction from any member of that peaceful and excellent sect, that the pugnacity of Bright had something to do with the repeal of the Corn Laws. What, then, were the weapons with which this gigantic contest was carried on? It was not carried on with the arm of the flesh. “Our march,” said the League, in its farewell manifesto, “has been stained by no blood, and our success is sullied by no tears.” No, they slew their giant with the smooth stone from the brook of hard facts, and there is no more formidable weapon. When they started on their crusade it was no doubt to some extent a class crusade. It was the old crusade carried on by the townspeople against the country people. They would not have been able to raise the vast sums that they did or a purely abstract and philanthropic enterprise. But remember one or two things in connection with that. It very soon ceased to be a class agitation, and comprehended almost all classes of the community before it had achieved its victory. The next point is this, that if it was a class agitation, it was a class struggle in more senses than one, because it was a class fighting against a class—it was the commercial class fighting against the landed class. And, in the third place, I would have you to remember that what money was raised even by an appeal to class interest was spent, not in corruption, but in enlightenment. What it did was to bring home to the nation the facts of its own situation. Well these facts as I have said, were deadly weapons.

#### CONDITION OF ENGLAND BEFORE FREE TRADE.

Never, I think, was the condition of England so gloomy, not even during the great war against France, as it was at the time when this agitation was taken up by this Chamber of Commerce. Let me give you two or three facts, very elementary facts, or I would rather say let me recall them, because they are probably known

to you. There were 20,000 persons in one place whose average earnings were only 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. a week; there were 10,000 in another who were on the verge of starvation. In Manchester 116 mills and other works were standing idle; 681 shops and offices were untenanted; 5,492 dwellings were unoccupied. In one district of Manchester there were 2,000 families without a bed among them, 8,666 persons whose weekly income was only 1s. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. In Stockport 73,314 persons had received relief whose average weekly income was 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Some grim humorist had chalked up on a shutter in that town, "Stockport to let." Carlyle sums it up in a sentence, "So many hundred thousands sit in the workhouses, another hundred thousand have not got even workhouses, and in thrifty Scotland itself, in Glasgow, in Edinburgh city, in their dark lanes, hidden from all but the eye of God, and the rare benevolence of the minister of God, there are scenes of woe and destitution and desolation such as one may hope the sun never saw before in the most barbarous regions where men dwelt." That was the condition of the commercial districts when Cobden and his band of brothers began their agitation, and when they fought their fight. Then came at last the Irish Famine, that great object lesson of the Corn Laws, that curse which was to breed a blessing, and under the shadow of that calamity the victory was won. Well, the little meeting of seven people in a stable yard in Manchester was to overthrow one of the most powerful Governments and the most powerful interest which could be conceived in England. But what is strange and beautiful in the result is this—that the Minister whom they had overthrown, the Minister whom they had compelled and convinced and vanquished, shares the glory of the victory with them.—(Cheers.) They were fortunate in that at the head of the Government there was a man like Sir Robert Peel—(cheers),—one of the two Prime Ministers of this century who have been distinguished above all others by a true, tender, transparent political conscience.—(Loud cheers). He was one. I will not name the other. (Prolonged cheering, the whole audience rising.) It was fortunate, as I say,

for the League that Robert Peel was Prime Minister at that time, and it is certain that the name of Peel will go down united with the name of Cobden and the others as the fathers and benefactors of this great movement.—(Cheers.)

Ladies and gentlemen, you may well say to me, “All this was long ago, all this is done and achieved for ever; why recall it to us, who know it so well?” I say, on the other hand, you cannot recall it too often, and on an occasion like this we should be almost sinners if we did not commemorate it. Standing in this hall, built on the very site of the massacre of Peterloo, on this historic spot, on this historic occasion, we cannot too well remember what that fight was and from what it saved us.—(Cheers.) I will tell you one thing, at least, from which it assuredly did save you. It saved you not merely from starvation, but it saved you from revolution.—(Hear, hear.) Mr. Bright in 1845 said, and said with truth, “There is no institution in this country—the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Church, or any other whatever—of which I will not say, attach it to the Corn Laws, and I will predict its fate.” And who can doubt that at the time he spoke, with the condition of things that I have described, and with the revolution of 1848, which shook every throne and every constitution in Europe but ours, looming ahead, who can doubt that if the beneficent change of 1846 had not taken place, that a revolution would not have been the result in this country? (Cheers.) That is one supreme result. There is another, also a negative result, which I can describe by a single distortion of a sentence. Lord Melbourne, on a famous occasion in the House of Lords, said that he had heard of many mad things, but, before God, the idea of the repeal of the Corn Laws was the maddest he had ever heard of. (Laughter.) Well, if you substitute for the word “repeal” the word “re-enactment,” you have, I think, one certain result of the agitation of Cobden.—(Hear, hear.) Of all the mad things we have heard in our days, the re-enactment of the Corn Laws is the maddest we can possibly conceive.—(Loud cheers.)

Now, it is always well, I think, not to overstate your



case. It must be perfectly clear to us all that in the ecstasy and in the enthusiasm of this great revolution, men hoped from it more than it has been able to accomplish. It has not, for example, produced peace and disarmament. I do not care to measure the extent or the density of the thick war-cloud which broods over Europe. I do not care to compute the number of millions of armed men who stand ranged in battle array, face to face, on the continent of Europe, like bewitched armies, waiting only the evil spirit to rouse them into life and activity ;—(Cheers.)—but at any rate we can say this, that if the increase of armies has gone on by gigantic strides since the repeal of the Corn Laws, that is not due to Free Trade ; but, on the other hand, those very military preparations have led those countries far from Free Trade into fiscal errors, as we believe them to be, to the hampering of their trade, the restriction of their commerce, and the imposition of protective duties which we believe to be detrimental to their industry.—(Hear hear.) Again, it is true that the sanguine expectations of the promoters of Free Trade have not been realised, because they have found very few imitators in the world. But Cobden did not demand imitation as a condition of success. He declined to be judged by imitation as a test of his success. He said, “ If Free Trade be a good thing for us we will have it. Let others take it if it be a good thing for them ; if it be not, let them do without it.”

#### FREE TRADE AND AGRICULTURE.

Well, there is another point on which I think some of our friends think that Free Trade has been a failure. I mean with regard to the agriculture of this country.—(Hear, hear.) I hear a faint ripple of applause. I do not know if it comes from a distressed or a reassured agriculturist, but I am perfectly certain that this hall will be a building even more exceptional than I think it is if it does not contain an agriculturist who is full of complaints. For, after all, the first necessary condition of agriculture—and I say it not with a smile, but in grim earnest—is that it always has complained, that it always must complain, and that it always will complain. From

the times of Theocritus and Virgil, and even from further back—I suspect, from the time when Adam delved—agriculture had been in a state of complaint. (Laughter.) And who can wonder at it? I say in perfect gravity that that is a necessary condition of a trade or calling which is at the mercy of every whim and humour of Nature. There is no conceivable weather which will suit every crop, and so farmers look on all weathers with impartial foreboding.—(Laughter.) What may secure a harvest may ruin roots; what may swell a swede may drown an oat.—(Laughter.) Innumerable diseases haunt animals and crops. A poisonous beast may taint the cattle of a nation; a sick potato may starve a race. It is impossible to put any limit to the afflictions which in the ordinary course of Nature, without any interference from Art, harrass the agriculturalist. When he has an abundance, prices fall. When prices rise, there is nothing to sell.—(Laughter.) You laugh, but it is no laughing matter. I am a landowner and a farmer, and for such it is a long tragedy. And if you put aside even what Nature has done as against the farmer, you have besides what is even more ruinous: the increasing means of communication—the great steamers that cross the ocean and bring to our markets the abundant harvests of Australia, India, America, and Russia. Farmers are now not Scottish or English or Welsh or Irish, they are cosmopolitan. They contend in the markets, not with their neighbours or with those of the adjoining counties, but with distant and virgin regions of the world. Altogether, I confess I think that the complaints of agriculturalists are more well founded than complaints of a class usually are. Agriculture suffers under Free Trade, and has always suffered since the Garden of Eden, and will always suffer. But the question is with us to-night: Is agriculture worse off now than it was under the operation of the Corn Laws? Now, as far as we can judge, farmers are better off than they were before the repeal of the Corn Laws.—(Cheers.) They live now at a much higher standard, they pay a much lower rent, their purchasing power is vastly increased by Free Trade. And what was the condition of the farmers of England before Free



Trade? There was a Committee of the House of Commons that sat in 1836 to consider the condition of agriculture in this country. It sent up a report which was an account of almost universal ruin and almost universal insolvency. From such counties, as Lincoln, Middlesex, Surrey, Northampton, and Suffolk there came the statement that farmers were paying their rent out of capital. From Buckinghamshire it was positively asserted that a great many of the farmers had failed, and that at least half of the remainder were insolvent. Of the tenantry of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire, the same, or worse was testified. They were "verging on insolvency—the most desperate state men can be in." And so forth; it is unnecessary to multiply monotonous testimony.

Well, then, the next class that we have to consider are the labourers. Is it not perfectly true that the labourers, though their condition is not what it should be in the agricultural districts even yet, are infinitely better off than they were before 1846 in wages, in purchasing power, and in the dwellings they inhabit? Go into the country districts on a Sunday, and you will see a well-dressed population of labourers and their families that you can scarcely distinguish from the best in the neighbourhood. But what was the condition of things before the repeal of the Corn Laws? There is in a book that I recommend you to read—if you have leisure to read a work of two volumes on a political subject—Mr. Jephson's "History of the Political Platform," a most pathetic account, taken from the "Times" newspaper of that date, of a meeting of the agricultural labourers of Wiltshire in January, 1846, four or five months before the repeal of the Corn Laws was actually achieved. Will you pardon me if I read one or two sentences from it? "The chairman was a labourer; the speakers, with the exception of two, were labourers. The object in view was to call public attention to the present condition of the labouring population in this part of the country, and to petition Her Majesty and the Legislature to take decisive steps for the speedy relief of their extreme distress. The meet-

ing was to have been held in a large booth erected in a field, but the great expense of providing such accommodation was beyond the combined contributions which these poor people could spare from their very scanty means, and therefore they were compelled to assemble together in the cross-road of the village, and to endure the inclemency of a winter night, while they talked over their common sufferings. The whole of the arrangements and proceedings were strikingly characteristic of the occasion. A hurdle, supported by four stakes driven into the ground beneath a hedge on the roadside, formed a narrow and unsteady platform, capable of supporting only the chairman and one speaker at a time. . . . Four or five candles, some in lanthorns, and others sheltered from the wind by the hands that held them, threw a dim and flickering light upon the groups on this spot, before and around which were gathered nearly 1,000 of the peasantry of Wiltshire. . . . In the shadows of the night the distinctive garb of their class was everywhere discernible, and when the fluttering clouds permitted the moon to shine brightly in their faces in them might be seen written, in strong and unmistakable lines, anxiety, supplication, want, hunger. . . . One speaker said: 'I don't know much of the Corn Laws, only that they ha'n't done we labourers much good. It is a long time till July next, before we get new potatoes; and unless something turns up for we poor creatures, starvation stares us in the face on both hands.' Another speaker said, 'There was nothing left for them now but starvation or Free Trade.'" Well, I do not think that that description requires any enlargement, or that anybody who reads it will doubt that the condition of the agricultural labourer was infinitely worse before the repeal of the Corn Laws than in our time.—(Cheers.)

Then there are the landlords. I feel like the man in the play, who says, "Ah! thou hast touched me nearly." (Laughter.) But I will only make one remark upon the landlords. Their rents have undoubtedly fallen since the means of communication have so greatly improved between foreign countries and ourselves; but I have only

one comment to make upon that, and it is this, that the interests of the nation cannot be sacrificed to the interests of a class,—(Cheers.)—and though I feel the deepest sympathy with the sufferings of many landlords whose cases I know, yet I believe they would be the first, in a spirit of patriotism, to deny any claim that the nation should be sacrificed to them. (Hear, hear.) I must also make one further remark: that, so far as we can judge from inquiry, the condition of agriculture in foreign countries, in spite of bounties and in spite of protective duties, is not much better, and in some cases is certainly worse, than the condition of agriculture in Great Britain under Free Trade. (Cheers.)

#### COMMERCIAL RESULTS OF FREE TRADE.

But there is one point as to which the results of Free Trade are absolutely unmistakeable, and they are the commercial results. May I read to you two sets of figures, which will show this in a moment. In 1846—the year when the Corn Laws were repealed—the total imports of this country were about £76,000,000 sterling in value. They are believed to have been somewhat overrated, but certainly were not underrated. In 1896, after fifty years' operations of Free Trade, they are £441,802,000, showing an increase of £365,855,000, or 481 per cent. The total exports in 1846 were £74,000,000; in 1896 they were £296,370,000, showing an increase of £222,250,000, or 300 per cent. The exports of British and Irish products in 1846 were £57,786,000, nearly £58,000,000; in 1896 they were over £240,000,000 or £182,000,000 more, showing an increase of 315 per cent.; and the exports of foreign and colonial productions were £16,296,000 in 1846, and £56,233,000 in 1896, showing an increase of about £40,000, or 245 per cent. (Cheers.) Now any comment on those figures would rob them of their importance and their weight. They are more like a fairy tale than the sort of statistics that they turn out from the Board of Trade; but they are literally and exactly true, and they are largely due to the work which was done by Villiers, Cobden, Bright, and Peel.—(“Hear, hear.”)



But there is one effect of Free Trade which may seem strange and paradoxical to you, but on which I, for my part, lay the very greatest stress. I believe that one of the most important effects of Free Trade has been the maintenance and the consolidation of the British Empire. ("Hear, hear." Now, I fear this may seem strange and paradoxical to those who have been brought up in the belief, which is commonly asserted, that Cobden and what is called the Manchester School were hostile or indifferent to the existence of the Empire. But Cobden's own testimony on this point is simple and direct enough. He says, "People tell you I want to abandon our colonies, but I say, 'Do you intend to hold your colonies by the sword, by armies and ships of war?' That is not a permanent hold upon them. I want to hold them by their affections."—(Cheers.) I think in that definition you must allow the word affections to include the word interests, because national affections which are not based on national interests, because national are apt to be sterile plants. But I think that if you allow me that amplification, and allow that national affections shall include for this purpose national interests, you have a true and complete definition of the best foundation of the British Empire. Under that policy, at any rate, the Empire has marched with seven-leagued boots, until in this year of grace we have been privileged to witness a moving panorama of empire, and, what is more, to receive the proposals of Sir Wilfred Laurier, offering on behalf of Canada commercial facilities to the mother country for the avowed purpose of drawing us closer and closer together.—(Cheers.)

#### FREE TRADE AND THE EMPIRE.

But I will explain in a moment to you why it is that, in my opinion, Free Trade has had so important an effect in maintaining and in consolidating this Empire. In the first place, it has produced the wealth that has enabled us to sustain the burden, and the burden of an Empire like ours must always be great as regards expenditure of energy and of money. Without Free Trade I venture to say that we should have been wholly unable to sustain it.

in 1841, when Sir Robert Peel came into power, we were staggering under a much less burden than we bear easily now, and staggering under it with deficits and with despair. We were then in a condition which bordered on revolution, and revolution means the dismemberment of our Empire. I venture, then, to say that both on the ground of maintenance and as having averted revolution, Free Trade has rendered enormous services to our Empire.

But these are not the sole services that Free Trade has rendered us. In my judgment, whatever that may be worth, Free Trade has preserved the Empire. The colonies, indeed, have not travelled very far in our wake with regard to our commercial policy. They know their own business best, and will work out their own salvation on their own lines. But I have an illustrious authority—perhaps the most illustrious outside these islands and inside the Empire—to sustain my view as to the preserving force of Free Trade upon our Empire. Sir Wilfrid Laurier said the other day: “There are parties who hope to maintain the British Empire upon lines of restricted trade. If the British Empire is to be maintained, it can only be upon the most absolute freedom, political and commercial. In building up this great enterprise, to deviate from the principle of freedom will be to so much weaken the ties and bonds which now hold it together.” Well, that is a view that I hold, and that I believe you hold in this hall.—(Cheers.) I believe that anything in the direction of an Imperial commercial league would weaken this Empire internally, and excite the permanent hostility of the whole world. Now, I begin to feel that in approaching this subject I ought to tread tenderly and delicately, because, though the proposition has been often made, it has been recently made from a political point of view, and therefore I ought perhaps to avoid it altogether. I treat it, however, not with regard to its recent development—which is only its latest—but as regards the doctrine which has been held forth for many years by men of both political parties, that such a league is eminently desirable. I tread delicately near



the subject for another reason, because I believe that the idea is dead.—(Hear, hear.) I tread near it with the reverence due to a corpse.—(Laughter and cheers.) Now, I respect all serious proposals for binding our Empire more closely together. A great part of my life I have been studying those proposals, and I respect their motive and try to support them, but this particular proposal, I believe, would have a directly contrary effect to that which its promoters claim for it. In the first place, it would be a disturbance of Free Trade. Free Trade need not be considered an idol or a fetish, but it is at all events the system on which our commercial greatness has grown up and developed, and he would be a rash man that would endeavour to lay hands upon it—(Cheers.) In the next place, the proposal, if I understand it rightly, would tend to interpose checks upon the free import of the food of the people. I believe that that is absolutely impracticable, but that if it were practicable and were done in the name of the empire, it would only succeed in making the empire odious to the working classes of this country.—(Cheers.) And there is another objection, not less fatal—although it is external and not internal.

Gentlemen, I think it must have occurred to you that such an empire as ours cannot be built up without exciting great jealousies. The aggrandisement of nations is something like the aggrandisement of individuals. If you see a person who was very poor suddenly blossom out with a prodigious fortune you are apt to envy him, and further to believe that that fortune may not have been too honestly acquired. I suspect that something of the same sensation comes over foreign nations when they look at the chart of the world and see how largely the British empire bulks in it.—(Cheers.) That may be the reason—I know of no other, and certainly of no better,—that may be the reason for a fact which you must regard as one of the most salient factors in our foreign policy, in our Imperial policy—(“Hear, hear.”)—and in our relations with foreign nations—I mean the general envy and suspicion with which we are regarded abroad. Nothing is more amazing to the ordinary Briton than to discover

the deep-rooted suspicion of our motives, of our policy, and of our action which is entertained towards us in foreign countries; a feeling, no doubt, with which we have sometimes regarded other nations, but which we are completely stupified at discovering with respect to ourselves. You, I daresay, can scarcely understand it; you are conscious, as citizens of a great nation, of high, noble, and even chivalrous aims, and you cannot understand that in pursuing these aims the foreign observer is apt to suspect or think that he detects a trick. Well, I cannot lay too much stress on this point in regard to this subject. I am perfectly certain of this, and I think all your friends who travel will tell you the same, that we lie, for various reasons, under the deep and abiding suspicion of foreign nations. That is a central fact; and under the circumstances I ask you whether, with your extended dominions, and with all your liabilities, it is not well, while you walk strongly, to walk warily upon the path of empire?—(Hear, hear). Well, apply this fact to the proposal to which I have been alluding. Suppose, in the face of this suspicion, that it were proposed to establish an Imperial Customs Union. I believe that to be an impossibility, but supposing it were possible, it would be something which would place all the nations of the world in direct antagonism to it—it is something which, if possible, they would all combine to destroy. We have of course a perfect right to do this, but, though all things may be lawful to us within our own borders, all things are not expedient; and I am discussing this now not as a question of right, but as a question of policy. My belief on this point is confirmed by something that happened this year. You will remember that this year we denounced our commercial treaties with Germany and with Belgium—an innocent step, a simple step, and rendered a necessary step under the happy impulse of Canada. But throughout Europe, in every newspaper, in every country, there was a note of alarm at what we thought was an obvious and ordinary proceeding. They seemed to see an important departure involved; they seemed to see something protentious and menacing. And if that were the case—

as it was—with regard to the denouncing of two commercial treaties, I ask you what the feeling of mistrust and suspicion would have been had we established, instead, an Imperial Customs Union?—(Cheers.) Remember, gentlemen, that in these later days every savage, every swamp, every desert, is the object of eager annexation or competition; and what in that state of circumstances would have been the feeling created by the development of a new empire—for under these new commercial conditions it would be new—not like the Russian Empire, local, though vast, but a world-wide Empire, surrounded by a Customs rampart, a challenge to every nation, a distinct defiance to the world? On the other hand, what is the present state of circumstances? Our Empire is peace, it makes peace, it means peace, it aims at peace.—(Cheers.) Its extension under Free Trade is for the benefit of all nations. Its motto is the old one of the volunteers:—“Defence, not defiance.” A scattered Empire like ours, founded upon commerce and cemented by commerce, an Empire well defended, so as not to invite wanton aggression, can mean and make for nothing but peace. We have on our side, in the long run, all that makes for peace and free commerce in the world. That is a fact that all nations know in their hearts. It is a fact that no wise statesman can hope to disregard. But an Empire spread all over the world, with a uniform barrier of a Customs Union presented everywhere, would be, in comparison—I will not say an empire of war, but a perpetual menace, or, at least, a perpetual irritation.—(Cheers.)

I say, then, that our Empire is peace,—that our Empire as at present constituted, under the wise guidance of a Free Trade policy, makes for peace, for commerce, and for enlightenment. Men in these days want little more than that; they are lucky if they get so much.—(Laughter.) But that is not all. If you want your foundations to be sounder still, if you wish to dig deeper and broader and stronger the foundations of this world-wide Empire, the home of all English peoples,

you want something more even than peace and commerce and enlightenment. You must take care that the corner-stones of that majestic structure are not simply peace, but honour ; honour and justice, and fair dealing to all, of whatever colour, who live within our borders. We as a nation have, I think, rarely been so fortunate as to obtain the affection of the subject races over which we rule, but we have at least earned their respect—we have earned their respect for upright government, for scrupulous truth, for straightforward dealing as between governor and governed. If we maintain this high standard of energy and patriotism, I fear nothing for that Empire of which we are privileged to form a part.—(Cheers.) But we have the example of other empires before us, and if through any lapse on our part, if for any reason whatever it be written in the inscrutable decrees of Fate that we are to follow their example and to crumble and disappear, we can at least resolve this—that we will leave behind us a monument more splendid and more durable than any constructed by the Cæsars and the Pharaohs—the memory of an empire of which the mottoes and the corner-stones were honour, and justice, and peace.—(Cheers.) These, gentlemen, I venture to think, are the teachings of this hall and of this occasion. (Cheers.)



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